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ABSTRACT

The lines separating the components of educational, personal, and career counseling may be becoming less distinct. A shift to a new paradigm of holistic adult learner counseling by adult educators is evolving, with several major implications for the adult educator. Whether in a classroom setting or during one-on-one sessions with students, the adult educator counsels, facilitates, mentors, and advises within a wide context of individuals and situations. When approached for individual counsel, the educator may be exposed by the student to a broad range of issues, including dispositional barriers that address attitude and self-perception. These engagements suggest that many counseling attributes associated with problem identification are or should be used by the educator throughout the learning process. Adult educators must recognize and review the consequences associated with a shift from educator and course broker to a broader, more holistic counseling perspective. Implications for adult educators are as follows: adult educators will need an indepth understanding of and ability to synthesize implications of adult development theory when counseling adult students; adult educators should have a sound philosophical base of counseling theory and practice; adoption of a holistic paradigm of counseling may challenge other counseling professions; and adult educators must be sensitive to differences in advice-giving and counseling. (Contains 12 references.) (YLB)

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Running Head: NEW COUNSELING PARADIGMS IN ADULT EDUCATION

Education for the Future:
New Counseling Paradigms for Adult Education

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Abstract

In these uncommon times, amidst declining resources and escalating societal demands on both the individual and the educational process, adult educators will be challenged even more to provide optimum learning experiences for the adult learner. Counseling, mentoring or advising offered by Adult Educators in academe is traditionally thought to be limited to those instances where the adult educator and adult student are engaged in academic planning and discussion. It is argued that a more holistic approach to adult student counseling is evolving, with attendant professional implications to current and future adult educators as well as other professional counseling disciplines.

Introduction

As conceptualized by Kuhn (1970), paradigm shifts occur through "quantum leaps" that "provide gestalt-like theoretical changes in perspective about the nature of reality" (Cottone, 1992). Recent years have seen a number of dramatic social "shifts" with no abatement in sight. While it may be argued that not all have a direct bearing on the adult education process, evolutionary changes in business and adult learner population growth presents immediate and long term implications to the profession. Increased focus on each individual's contribution to the "bottom line" continue to change the nature and extent of our contact with others. Morawski (1996) notes that "With the growth of big organizations and bureaucratic institutions, secondary ties are the main form of human interaction. But still, there is a need in the human being for warm, holistic interaction." Echoing the sentiments of others, Peterson (1983) notes that "We can observe social changes, however, that suggest that while life expectancy will continue to increase, substantial changes will occur in the distribution of education, work, and leisure across the life span." Perhaps predicting one unresolved implication of Peterson's observation, Robbins (1978) noted that "A major need is for more information and counseling resources to help adults choose their educational and career goals."

Today's "nature of reality" with regards to paradigms of counseling services suggests at least three distinct professional components: educational, career and personal counseling (Paolucci, 1991). Whereas institutions and professional organizations strive to maintain clear bureaucratic guidelines, actual practice often appears to follow a more convenient if not holistic route. Bornheimer, Burns and Dumke (1973) note that "Faculty advisors, counseling specialist and occasionally placement offices all share responsibility for career counseling, but the greatest impact may come from the faculty member." Corey (1996) terms these combinations of roles "dual relationships", which "occur when a counselor assumes two (or more) roles simultaneously or sequentially with a client. Some examples of dual relationships are combining the roles of teacher and therapist."

It is suggested that the lines separating the components of educational, personal and career counseling are becoming less distinct, and that a shift to a new paradigm of holistic adult learner counseling by adult educators is evolving , with several major implications to the adult educator.

Discussion

Whether in a class-room setting or during one-on-one sessions with students, the adult educator counsels, facilitates, mentors and advises within a wide context of individuals and situations. Corey observes that the "role of a counselor is to create a climate in which clients can examine their thoughts, feelings and actions and eventually arrive at solutions that are best for them." Hefferman (1981) suggests that "counseling is a general term used to describe the person to person or group processes that enable clients to make decisions regarding education and life/work planning." Through a process of self-discovery, the active adult educator strives to emotionally engage the adult learner, not only for the specific subject materials at hand, but to encourage life-long learning as well. Emotional feedback by the student may include student expression of feelings, questions asked, reactions to classroom events or a sharing of personal lives (Slusarski, 1994).

When approached for individual counsel, the educator may be exposed by the student to an even broader range of issues, including dispositional barriers which address attitude and perception about oneself (Cross, 1981). These engagements suggests that many counseling attributes associated with problem identification are or should be used by the educator throughout the learning process. Following clarity of the problem or situation, counseling actions available to the educator may include offering of encouragement, clarification of misconceptions, or acknowledgment that such issues are important to the student. How one actually responds may often be dictated by one's intrinsic, if not thoroughly researched philosophical orientation.

Listening with empathy and an encouraging demeanor as a means to help students discover their own solutions suggests a humanistic, Rogerian philosophy of counseling, exhibited by the belief that people "have the capacity for self-direction and constructive

personal change" (Corey). Active challenging of misperceptions by confronting irrational beliefs or actions suggests Reality Therapy techniques developed by William Glasser. Although there may be claims that such intercourse is natural behavior, related counseling or psychotherapy techniques suggest that counseling relationships potentially exist between the educator and student. It remains, however, for Adult Educators in academe to recognize and review the consequences associated with a shift from educator and course advisor to a broader, more holistic counseling perspective. Should such services be institutionalized, the following implications relative to the education and practice of the adult educator should be considered.

Adult Development Theory

Adult Educators in academe will need to have an in-depth understanding of and an ability to synthesize implications of adult development theory when counseling adult students. Cross observes that the different situational, institutional and dispositional barriers to learning that exist throughout the life span provides insight into some of the services needed by adult learners of various age groups. Peterson further expands on these barriers to learning by noting that "Although we still think of America as a mass society, it is becoming a large number of minisocieties in which preferences, goals, and procedures differ significantly." Elias and Merriam (1984) note that, whether making referrals or simply trying to be supportive, adult educators need a through understanding of the stages and transitions of adult life, the stages of career development and interrelationships with careers, and counseling techniques with individuals in transition.

Counseling Theory

Whether counseling, advising, coaching or mentoring, the adult educator should have a sound philosophical base of counseling theory and practice. Elias and Merriam conclude that "when considering the interrelationship of philosophy and activity, it is clear that philosophy inspires one's activities, and gives direction to practice." While it may be true that many adult educators are capable of performing (and performing well) counseling functions without regard to the philosophical foundations of their practice, the risk of

unintentional, individual bias and potential lack of interrelatedness within a process of educating the entire person may exist.

Political

Although it is not intended that direct competition with personal and career counselors will materialize, adoption of a holistic paradigm of counseling by adult educators may be considered a challenge to other counseling professions, yielding potentially significant professional and political implications. Yet, as noted by Cattonni, "it is context that is relevant in competitive tests of counseling paradigms, not nature as an objective reality."

Ethics

The adult educator must be sensitive to the implications created by differences in advice-giving and counseling. Additionally, we must be unbiased when it is necessary to refer a student to another service or institution when it becomes clear that our own abilities are becoming challenged by the situation at hand. Clearly in this context, alliance must be to the student needs versus the institution or personal pride if the two are in conflict.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The rich history of adult education suggests recurrent ties to the philosophical orientations of psychology and psychiatry, with much common ground from which many helping professions have relied. Counseling activities by adult educators appears to be politically cast as advice-giving in the context of educational services. In actual practice, however, there appears to be sufficient evidence to suggest that meaningful learning relationships with adults brings with them situations that mirror if not duplicate counseling functions. Should this be correct, and if one is open to the concept that practice can drive theory, a new paradigm of counseling by adult educators may be emerging and worthy of further study. Additional research is recommended to determine the extent to which personal and career counseling is performed by adult educators and to identify corresponding implications to the adult education profession itself.

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